

2, 1977 - 2-14 - 1983 - 7/1/88

The Mountain People of the South



Published by the
Woman's Board of Home Missions of the
Methodist Episcopal Church, South



The Mountain People of the South.

UNTIL they were portrayed by the writers of stories, little or nothing was known of the people inhabiting the Mountains of the South. The section thus overlooked is the southwestern part of the Appalachian Mountain System. It extends from Virginia to Alabama, is about five hundred miles in length, and two hundred and fifty miles in width; includes one hundred and ninety-four counties, and has a population, according to the last census, of 2,657,497. Within this district are found two classes of people, and there is lacking that public spirit and common interest which weld together other communities of our country. One class is the cultivated and intelligent people living on the fertile farms and in villages in the valleys, and the other, numbering between one and two millions, dwelling in the mountain districts. Superficial observers get entirely opposite views of the characteristics and the needs of the people of this section. If one travels in the valleys only, he sees that, simply by the exercise of more thrift and energy, the institutions of church and school could soon be made equal to any in our land; and, providing his route has kept him only in the mountain districts, he is overwhelmed to find his own race and nation so sorely in need of educational advantages, so poorly housed, so bound by poverty, so regardless or so hopeless concerning the future welfare of their children. Did the observer spend more time and study the facts more impartially he would see that his genial host lacked most sadly the qualification of that "liberal mind which deviseth

liberal things;" and he would find himself unable to unravel the mystery as to whether matters of public industry are thus left to drift because of a lack of energy, because of poverty, or because of a feeling of dislike for the lower classes by those of superior rank and education. On the other hand, if he spent a few hours in any mountain settlement, he would find staunch and worthy men and women whose lives are circumscribed by ignorance and poverty, but who are longing for better things for themselves and for their children. The families of such as these are the strongest reserve forces of the church and the nation to-day. To bring out this reserve force needs more power and purse than can be furnished alone by the genial, intelligent, kind-hearted dwellers in the valleys, who are ever ready to co-operate with and use their influence to help forward genuine, honest, disinterested work for the benefit of the Mountain People. It is well to understand the ground of contradictory statements made by superficial observers, because they are the persons who have most time and most inclination to express themselves in print. The one endeavors to persuade the northern churches that there is no need for Mission Work in the South among the white people; the other so degrades and brands the whole section that all Mission Work is brought into disrepute by their unjust and indiscriminating remarks, and we feel like exclaiming with the people of Drumtochty, "What right has any human being to fling about superlative adjectives, seeing what a big place the world is and how little we know."

All who know them recognize that the Mountain People are of Scotch-Irish descent.

I began to investigate as to the truth or falsity of this belief. I sought for some histories that would treat of the subject in the libraries of Pittsburgh and Allegheny. I could find none. I applied, through a friend, to the Congressional Library at Washington, D. C. I was informed there was no work in which their origin was treated of in that library, and the learned librarian expressed the opinion that there was no book which contained any account of their origin. I then engaged in an extensive correspondence with persons who had mingled with these people, had intercourse with them, had seen their physical, mental and moral characteristics, and had heard them tell of their own origin and traditions, and thus been able to form

some reliable judgment in regard to the matter. The replies given to my letters furnish testimonies and proofs which establish it beyond all reasonable doubt that the inhabitants of this mountain region are very largely of Scotch-Irish descent.

Some of my correspondents were Rev. C. A. Duncan, D.D., and Judge John P. Smith, Jonesboro, Tenn.; Rev. A. M. Penland, Beech, N. C.; Rev. Jno. M. Davies, D.D., now of Noblesville, Ind.; Rev. John E. Alexander, Greenville, Tenn.; Miss Clare de Graffenried, a writer for the Century Magazine; Miss Florence Stephenson, Principal of the Home Industrial School, Asheville, N. C.; Rev. J. C. Kelly, M.D., D.D., Nashville, Tenn., a distinguished minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, whose addresses on General Andrew Jackson, and General Sam. Houston and the Scotch-Irish in Tennessee, at successive meetings of the Scotch-Irish Society evidence his extensive knowledge of the subject. He writes thus:

"My studies in the history of the Scotch-Irish do not lead me to think that the mountaineers, to whom you refer, differ in origin from the other inhabitants of the States to which they belong. Their distinctive traits, do not, I think, come from origin, but from environment."

Kemp P. Battle, LL.D., the distinguished Professor of History in the University of North Carolina, writes thus: "The Mountaineers of Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky are of the same stock as the rest of the people of those States, principally from England, North Ireland and South Scotland. Some Germans are among them, but not many. Their peculiarities come from their isolation and remoteness from churches, towns and schools."

J. R. Gilmore, Esq., the author of several books in relation to this mountainous region, says he spent several years traveling over it obtaining knowledge of the matters concerning which he was writing; investigating the history of the Southwest, and tracing the footsteps of John Sevier over the mountains. This brought him into frequent intercourse with these people, and made him acquainted with their characteristics and traditions. He writes of them thus: "The Mountain White population of the Southern Alleghanies occupy what is the very heart of this country, and number about two millions, all of them native born, with an inherited love of freedom, and the intense patriotism which is peculiar to our American

character. These people, with scarcely an exception, are of the same blood as ourselves, of English, Scotch-Irish and Pennsylvania Dutch descent. The first settlers of the region, as far back as 1750, were intelligent, God-fearing men, who, with dauntless courage and determined will, had overcome the savages and the wilderness. Many of them bear the names and are the direct descendants of heroes who fought under John Sevier at King's Mountain, and smote with Jackson the veterans of Wellington at New Orleans. But ignorant though they generally are, there is not, in the whole country, a more honest, brave and liberty-loving class of men than these 'Mountain Whites,' and during our recent Civil War they developed qualities that do honor to our American manhood."

Bancroft says: "On January 20, 1775, a council met near Abingdon, Va., which was mostly composed of Presbyterians of Scotch-Irish descent. The spirit of freedom swept through their minds as naturally as the wind sighs through the fir trees of the Black Mountains. There they resolved never to surrender, but to live and die for liberty." Another council was held in Mecklenburg, N. C., May 31, 1775, which was composed largely of Scotch and Scotch-Irish people. They adopted some declarations and resolutions which were framed by twenty-seven Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, one-third of whom were Ruling Elders. Bancroft says: "These declarations were in effect a declaration of independence, as well as a complete system of government." In part they said: "We do hereby dissolve the political bands which have connected us with the mother country, and do absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British Crown. We declare ourselves a free and independent people." This was more than a year before the Declaration of Independence was signed by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, July 4, 1776.

Rev. C. A. Duncan, speaking of the mountaineers as the descendants of the patriot soldiers of the Revolutionary War, says: "It would naturally follow that the descendants of such men would be loyal to the Government. In the Civil War of 1860-65 they gave abundant proof of this fact by the sufferings of the people of this region for the cause of the Union, and by the number of soldiers they furnished to the Union army. Notwithstanding they had to leave their homes by night and travel across mountains and swollen streams two hundred miles, to reach the Union army, the first and

Second Congressional districts of Tennessee furnished more soldiers to the Federal army, according to their population, than any other two Congressional districts in the United States."

But there are some who still refuse to accept this testimony and these proofs, and present two objections as the reason for their disbelief. The first objection is that the Scotch-Irish are always and everywhere thrifty, while the mountaineers are thriftless. This objection is answered by several correspondents incidentally. Rev. Dr. Kelley says: "The regions in which they live are unproductive, and three generations on such soil will bring degeneration to any race. When you add to this the fact that the earlier settlers found a hunting life more productive than tilling the soil you have the two influences which have doomed the people. Hunting begat idleness; poverty of soil brings no incentive to work." Another correspondent says on this point: "A Scotchman even will not work when there is no incentive." The second objection for not accepting the statement that these people are of Scotch-Irish descent is that they are not Presbyterian in their church connection. This is easily explained. The Presbyterians, a hundred years ago, did not supply them with gospel ordinances; and the successive generations accepted the church connection of those who ministered to them. There are strong evidences that many of the ancestors of these mountaineers were Presbyterians.

A seemingly trivial proof adds force to this point. In several mountain districts I have heard yeast bread called "Presbyterian bread," and learned that it was so named from the fact that the early Presbyterian settlers were such strict Sabbath observers that they would not bake biscuit or corn bread on the Sabbath day, although no mountaineer relishes cold bread. Different correspondents have written that they have been told by mountaineers that their ancestors were Presbyterians. One correspondent states that in a very limited acquaintance with Methodist ministers among them, two of them stated that their ancestors were Presbyterians.

The great grandfather of one of these Methodist ministers was a Presbyterian minister who came from Scotland with his entire congregation and settled at a place which they named Scotland Neck, in Halifax County, North Carolina.

Another correspondent writes that he knows three Methodist preachers among the mountains who say their ancestors were Presbyterians. The surnames are with four exceptions Scotch, and Scotch-Irish. There are many girls whose given names are Caledonia, and some are named Binnie.

That veteran foreign missionary, Mrs. Pepburn of Japan, whose early home was in Central North Carolina, tells a significant incident. She recalls the first trip she took with her husband after their marriage, more than fifty years ago, when with her father—a Presbyterian elder—they went up to the meeting of Synod—a great gathering in the woods like a camp-meeting. She says there were eight hundred communicants there and all the services were in *Gaelic*.

Ownership of church buildings is another proof. A correspondent, having a very limited acquaintance in the mountain sections found one church building which originally belonged to Presbyterians and is now occupied entirely by other denominations. Another church, which originally belonged to Presbyterians, is now jointly owned by three other denominations, the Presbyterians retaining only one-fourth part of the ownership.

These facts remove this second objection, and warrant the opinion that many of the ancestors of these people were Presbyterian in their church connection, as well as being of Scotch-Irish stock. Judge Smith says: "They have inherited the traditions of their ancestors, and their reverence for the Bible, and are tenacious of its teachings, and are not easily led off by heresies. The sturdy, loyal, faithful, tenacious traits of the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians are predominant, and the people remember with commendable pride from whom they are descended."

In reference to what brought the mountaineers into their present condition, J. R. Gilmore says: "Their ancestors, being too poor or too conscientious to hold slaves, were, more than one hundred years ago, forced back to the mountains by the slave-holding planters of the seaboard and isolated there, and deprived of schools and churches. The present generation have grown up in ignorance of their rights and duties as American citizens." [At the present time the Public School Fund of Western North Carolina does not average more than one dollar per annum for each child of school

age. This is the state tax and it is the rare exception for any local tax to be laid. It can be readily seen that the public cannot be depended upon to educate the children of this generation; and the Mountain People are too poor to sustain private schools.] "The present condition of these people is directly traceable to slavery; for, in making the slave the planter's blacksmith, carpenter, wheelwright, and man-of-all-work, slavery shut every avenue of honest employment against the working white man and drove him to the mountains or the barren sand hills."

After the battle of King's Mountain, the surviving patriots suffered much distress from poverty, and from the British Army, and from the Tories. They had to bestir themselves for some means of livelihood. The young and vigorous, who had few encumbrances, crossed the mountains into Tennessee and Kentucky, and got possession of the good lands. The older persons with families of children, or those who had aged parents to care for, reached the mountains and squatted on land that was not wanted, and supported themselves largely by hunting.

In 1792 Whitney invented the cotton gin. Cotton lands became more valuable; slaves did the work. The non-slaveholders could not find employment, either as artisans or as field hands. Those that were embarrassed and trying to hold their lands had to sell out; and thus an increased number had to betake themselves to the mountains. Some of those that had to remove west were able to go over the mountains into the lowlands as Jackson and others did. There were no schools in the mountains. There were few church privileges. There were few books, for even the few that were in the hands of the Colonists had been burnt with their houses; and they had no means with which to replace them. The first generation of children were much more illiterate than their parents. The houses were small. The youth married early and the neighbors helped the new couple to put up a small log cabin. Each succeeding generation was more illiterate than the preceding one. Idleness, hunting and poor soil, with their isolation, absence of schools, and churches without an educated ministry, have produced that condition of thriftlessness and poverty in which they are now found.

Another cause of their condition is found in the excessive use of tobacco by the women and children. There are but few women and

girls in the mountain districts who do not dip snuff, and in many families it is given to very small children. This habit degrades the morals, and impairs the intellect of the people, besides adding to their shiftlessness and thriftlessness. If the women could be lifted above this degrading habit, the one-roomed log cabin would give place to comfortable houses.

They are still living in a chronic pioneer state, and will continue so to live until they are spurred on by personal contact with and the example of energetic, educated, spiritual-minded teachers and ministers to forget those things which are behind and press toward the ideals of their Scotch-Irish ancestry.

It is not necessary to enlarge upon the condition in which these descendants of brave, heroic and worthy ancestors are found. It is well known that they are very illiterate. They are poorly supplied with school and church privileges. The schools they have are ill-adapted to educate the children. The ministry is imperfectly qualified for its high calling. It is evident all the industries, including farming, suffer from the unprogressive spirit of the people, who are too poor and too indifferent to do anything to remedy this state of things. It is an admitted principle of Christian duty to afford help and assistance to those who are in need. In accordance with this principle every denomination of Christians has a Home Mission Board to assist the small and feeble churches throughout country districts, and in the new and sparse settlements in the West to support churches and colleges. There are special efforts to help and succor the Mormons, the Indians and the Negroes. This is all as it should be, and the effort for them all ought to be greatly increased. But why is so little done for the Mountain Whites, whose numbers equal the entire population of the States of Oregon, Colorado and Washington? The Mountain People have a special claim upon those of us who are of the Scotch-Irish race and of the Presbyterian Church; they are bound to us by the double bonds of ancestry and of church relationship. During the time of our failure to supply them with gospel privileges, Methodist and Baptist churches were established. These denominations have done all in their power to furnish means and men for church work; but there still remains very much land to be possessed.

No denomination in the South is financially able to furnish an

adequate number of schools and churches among the mountains, but the fact is recognized that all church interests are advanced by such aid as comes from the North; so, in the cause of God and humanity, they bid us a hearty welcome to this field where our "kith and kin" have fallen into a condition of ignorance and thriftlessness unworthy of their noble ancestry. Their latent Scotch-Irish characteristics are revived by the influence of good schools and the plain, practical, intelligent preaching and teaching of the Word of God. The Lord has been magnified through the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the Scripture taught in our schools to the hearts of the students and causing them to become "new creatures in Christ Jesus." From among this people, who have so long been passed by, the Master would call many laborers into His vineyard, if they were prepared for the service. Shall the Mountain People by their needs still longer appeal to us in vain? Shall the church membership, praying that young men and young women may be raised up for the ministry and for Christian teachers, be so engaged in schemes of their own devising that they will not wait before the Lord to have Him direct them to a sure way of answering their own prayers? The young people of the Southern Mountains have the brain, the brawn, the trend of mind needed by the church to-day. Money from church members is flowing by millions of dollars into institutions which furnish but few Christian workers. The money, no doubt, does a good work, but its work is not of the nature of that "better part" wherein no loss will be suffered in the coming trial by fire (I. Cor. 3:10-15).

Will not the Presbyterian Church, with an energy and earnestness born of Christian sympathy, awaken to the greatness of the occasion, and engage in well devised and persistent efforts to communicate to these mountaineers the rich blessings of church and educational advantages which they so much need? When a few years ago Charleston was desolated by an earthquake, and Memphis and Jackson were visited with the pestilence, a general and deep sympathy was felt for those who were suffering from these calamities. Large contributions were made and earnest and self-sacrificing laborers went to their relief. These people in the mountains are suffering from poverty and ignorance, the result of long-continued and cruel circumstances. Will not Presbyterians cherish in

their hearts a deep Christian sympathy for our fellow citizens who have met with most distressful calamities, and use their best efforts to bring them into the full possession of our best industrial and Christian progress? "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" In the midst of a naval battle a neutral officer assisted his own kith against a strange people, declaring that "blood was thicker than water." Now when patriotism, the ties of a common ancestry and faith, and the obligations of Christian love and sympathy all conjoin to induce us to engage in those efforts that will be fruitful of such great results, will we not heartily engage in the blessed work?

The Woman's Board and the Board of Home Missions are hindered from increasing their school and church work indefinitely only from lack of funds. Are these not grounds for encouragement in commencing such work: that the children are apt to learn; that the parents will send them; that they will acquire habits of industry and thrift; that they will become useful and industrious citizens and Christian workers? The testimonies on all these points are abundant and most gratifying from all those who are engaged in teaching among them.

The sum of \$600 will erect a home for teachers in any mountain district, and \$1,000 additional a good building to be used for school work and for preaching service. The people of a district will gladly furnish building site free of cost and give help in erecting of buildings to the extent of their ability. The annual expenses of carrying on a day school in the mountain district with two teachers is about \$500. By means of this expenditure one hundred children can be in school nine months of the year. The sum of \$2,000 or \$3,000 will build and equip a good house for academical work in the county seats, where such schools are greatly needed, and from which center their influence would extend to the bounds of the county. Money is also needed for the endowment of Industrial and Normal Boarding Schools, ministers' and teachers' salaries, for permanent scholarships, and for annual scholarships. All money for school work should be sent to the treasurer of the Woman's Board, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

The Presbyterians have some special advantages for engaging

in the work. There is at Asheville, N. C., the Home Industrial School, where one hundred and fifteen young women are being trained for usefulness in industrial work and, at the same time, securing such an intellectual and Christian education as prepares them to become teachers in the county public and private schools. Another school for young women, located at the same place and with a building to accommodate about two hundred and twenty-five students, is the Normal and Collegiate Institute. It is a school for higher education, where the course is equal to that of our best State Normal Schools in the North. There are two other schools for young women, one accommodating fifty students, the Dorland Institute, at Hot Springs, N. C., and the other of the same capacity, the Laura Sunderland Memorial, at Concord, N. C. The Boys' Farm School, located at Swannanoa, N. C., eight miles from Asheville, has room for one hundred boys. Its course of study is about the same as that of the Home Industrial School, and the boys desiring higher education may complete the course in one of the colleges in East Tennessee. These colleges are not mission schools, but are under the care of the Synod of Tennessee. Besides the five boarding schools named, the Woman's Board have under their care in North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky, thirty-one day schools or mission stations. In these boarding and day schools over 3,000 students are gathered.

All these schools, established for the Christian education of the young people of the Southern Mountain Region, have a constant struggle for life against poverty. Those in charge of their finances must devise such means and practice such close economy that the rehearsal of these things would bring swift sympathy and help from those of our church who are living in ease and luxury if attention and interest could be aroused to the need and outcome of Mission Work among the mountains of our Southland. Students must be refused entrance into our schools because there is not sufficient funds to supplement what support they, themselves, can furnish. Districts, pleading for Christian day schools, cannot be supplied. Congregations, starving for the Word of Life, must go unfed. The following tender and earnest appeal of the late Rev. John Hall, D.D., may touch the hearts of some of our Lord's stewards:

"There are still numbers of our Scotch-Irish countrymen that

are in comparative ignorance and comparative poverty, in need of friends, in need of loving agencies to be brought to bear upon them. Descriptions have been given to me of some of these men, women and children in the valleys between the mountains of this magnificent region, where the public schools do not provide and have not provided adequate opportunities for teaching; where a strong, sturdy, vigorous race has grown up combating with external difficulties, but with comparatively little education, and in many cases without the means of grace. Whenever you can, hold out a loving hand to them; wherever you can, send the Sunday-school teacher to them; wherever you can, send the minister to them; wherever you can, try to bring to bear upon them the forces that made our race in the face of innumerable difficulties, and do so in the fear and love of God. They are of our blood; they are of our race; they bear our names; they have gone through hard struggles. If we can hold out to them a loving, brotherly, gentle, Christian hand and lift them up, we shall be doing good to the land; we shall be doing indescribable good to them; and we shall be honoring those who gave us the benefits and the blessings for which we are to be profoundly thankful to our Creator."

Written by REV. A. P. HAPPER, D.D., Pittsburgh, Pa., March, 1893.

Revised and condensed by MISS FLORENCE STEPHENSON,
Asheville, N. C., September, 1895.

Price 3 cents each, \$3.50 per hundred.